

The Royal Great Seals Deputed of South Carolina

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With the ousting of the Lords Proprietors from control of the government of the southern part of their territory of Carolina in 1719 and the assumption of government by the British crown exercised through a Governor appointed by the King, the seal of the former Proprietors ceased to have legal validity within the now royal colony of South Carolina. Its place was taken (but not, given distance and the relative slowness of the administrative machinery of the period, upon the instant) by a royal Great Seal Deputed¹ for the colony, which upon its introduction henceforth gave legal validity and authentication to acts of the legislature, land grants and patents, writs issued in the King's name, and such other documents as required the application of this emblem of sovereignty to give them full legal force.²

On 20 September 1720 the Privy Council received a representation from the Board of Trade and Plantations that a new seal for South Carolina was needed together with a description of what the design of the new two-sided seal should be.³ The Privy Council ordered its Secretary that same day to issue a warrant to James Girard, Chief Engraver of Seals, to prepare the two silver dies needed, and the warrant was duly issued. It contained one most unusual provision, not found in the case of any of the other royal colonies in North America: "In case the said Seal cannot be got ready as soon as there will be occasion to make use thereof, that impressions in lead be made of that side only bearing His Majesty's Arms and Titles to be used by the said Governor till the other side can be made, and that proper warrants be likewise prepared for the Authorization, making and Using the same accordingly." Precisely why on this occasion so unusual a procedure should be adopted is not known, but the answer may lie in the fear of unauthorized use of the proprietorial seal before the longer lasting silver dies of the royal seal could be ready and sent. Although, in printed sources at least, no further documentation on the despatch of the leaden seal has been found, it was sent and used as will be seen below.

Having only succeeded to the office in 1719 in the place of John Roos, Girard had not had Roos's experience in the engraving of colonial seals, and it was not until 23 October 1721 that he laid the finished matrixes

(or dies) of the new seal of South Carolina before the Privy Council accompanied by his bill for the work.⁴ This bill, in accordance with standard practice, was submitted to the officers of the Royal Mint so that they might certify to the Treasury that the work had been satisfactorily performed and that the charges were reasonable.

By this date, 1721, it had become standard practice for the engraver to submit a proof impression from each matrix in support of his account. Unhappily, in the case of this first seal of South Carolina, these proof impressions for George I's seal do not survive. Given their fragile nature, this is not to be wondered at, but it is unfortunate. Proof impressions for the two succeeding reigns, as will be seen later, do, however, survive.⁵ Plate 1 shows, but with little detail, the obverse of George I's seal, a detached impression now in the series of Detached Seals in the Department of Manuscripts, the British Library (formerly the British Museum).⁶ The reverse of arms of this particular impression is so poor as to show virtually no detail, and no comparable proof impression survives at the Royal Mint for any colony other than Jamaica, which differs from that for South Carolina to an extent which makes it unfair to illustrate it even as an exemplar.

Girard's bill cited above, however, describes both sides of the seal in sufficient detail to overcome, in large measure, these deficiencies. The obverse (Plate 1) shows the King, crowned and robed, holding in his left hand the orb and in his right the scepter, which he extends to a woman loosely robed, her left breast bared, crowned with a mural crown and kneeling on her right knee before him, arms outstretched.

Both figures are upon an estrade or platform beneath which in the exergue, appears the motto assigned to the new colony PROPIUS RES ADSPICE NOSTRAS, a quotation from Vergil's *Aeneid* (Book I, line 526) which may be translated as "Look more closely upon our affairs" and interpreted as one wishes. In a border, the outer rim of which is composed of acanthus leaves, appears the identifying legend SIGILLUM PLAGAE AUSTRALIS PROVINCIAE NOSTRAE CAROLINAE ("The Seal of the Southern Part of Our Province of Carolina"), the words probably, on the basis of the Jamaican example, separated by a dot between each.

The reverse of arms showed, centrally placed and surmounted by a crown, a shield bearing the arms of the Hanoverian sovereigns,⁷ encircled by the ribbon of the Order of the Garter bearing the Order's motto HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE ("Evil to him that evil thinks"). On either side of the arms so encircled were the lion and unicorn supporters and beneath them in a scroll the royal motto DIEU ET MON DROIT ("God and my right").



PLATE 1 — Impression — George I Seal Obverse

Around the whole in the legend border, the outer rim of which, like the obverse, was made up of acanthus leaves, ran the royal titles in Latin. Here Girard faced a problem to tax the ingenuity of any seal engraver, for the Hanoverians' royal titles were long and sonorous. They are here rendered in full with those parts omitted on the seal itself enclosed in brackets: GEORGIUS D[EI] G[RATIA] M[AGNAE] BRIT[ANNIAE] FR[ANCIÆ] ET HIB[ERNIAE] REX F[IDEI] D[EFENSOR] BRUN[SWICENSIS] ET LUN[EBURGENSIS] DUX S[ACRI] R[OMANI] I[MPERII] AR[CHI]TH[ESAURARIUS] EL[ECTOR] (i.e., "George, by the Grace of God, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, Duke of Brunswick and Luneburg, Archtreasurer of the Holy Roman Empire and Elector"). One cannot but respect Girard's ingenuity.

The impression (both matrixes, in a press, were applied simultaneously to an appropriately sized cake of wax) measures approximately $4\frac{1}{4}$ " in diameter. The dies themselves would be slightly larger and, according to Girard's bill, contained 64 ounces of silver, which at 5s 3d an ounce cost £16/0/0 for materials to which was added the sum of £2/0/0 for a shagreen case and his fee of £60 for the work of engraving.⁸

On 27 October 1721, a warrant under the Royal Sign Manual was signed and sealed and addressed to the Governor of South Carolina authorizing him upon receipt of this new seal to bring it into use immediately, laying both this warrant and the new seal before the Council of the colony to identify it and authorize its use.⁹ At the same time, he was to deface the "old leaden seal"¹⁰ in the presence of the Council and then return it to the Committee for Trade and Plantations to be laid before the King in Council for formal defacement and eventual destruction.

The actual date of transmission of the seal has not yet been precisely identified, but on 18 August 1722 Francis Nicholson as Governor wrote to the Lords of Trade to say that he had received the seal on 25 July and that on that date he had laid the new seal before the Council and defaced the old one, which would be sent to England by a ship leaving before the end of the month.¹¹ At its meeting on 30 November the Committee for Trade and Plantations had before them Nicholson's letter and a copy of the proceedings in Council of 25 July together with the old seal.¹²

The death of George I on 11 June 1727 and the accession of George II brought in its train, amongst other things, the need for new seals for both government, administration, and courts at home and in the colonies over the seas. On 26 June 1727 a circular letter from the Committee for Trade and Plantations instructed all Governors of the colonies to proclaim the



PLATE 2 — Proof Impression — George II Seal Obverse

new King and to take note of the fact that, under the provisions of section 9 of the Act 6 Anne cap. 7 (the Act of Succession, 1707), all public seals in being at the time of the demise of his late Majesty were to continue in use and full force as the seals of the new King until orders were given to the contrary.¹³ On 23 August the Committee for Trade and Plantations made representation to the King in Council as to the need for new seals for the colonies,¹⁴ for the preparation of which on 27 September they received due authority by Order in Council of 20 September.¹⁵

On 6 October 1727 the new Chief Engraver of his Majesty's Seals, John Rollos, attended the Committee, in accordance with a warrant of 2 October,¹⁶ and work began on the drafting of a general warrant authorizing him to prepare new seals for all the colonies including South Carolina. A week later, the draft was further considered and "some progress made thereon,"¹⁷ and on 17 November the warrant in which the design for each seal was specified in detail was agreed and signed.¹⁸ Whilst Roos and Girard in grappling with the royal titles on George I's seals had used their own ingenuity and good sense, Rollos in this warrant was given a specific direction to use his discretion in contracting them.

Given the quantity of seals needed for the government, administration, and courts at home, it is not surprising that there should be delays in the preparation of the colonial seals. Four, all small single-sided seals of some 2" diameter, for Massachusetts Bay, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Bermuda, were ready in the summer of 1728.¹⁹ The larger, more intricate double-sided seals of 4¼" diameter, however, were not ready until the summer of the next year. On 18 August 1729 the new seals of Barbados, Jamaica, Virginia, and South Carolina were laid before the Queen, as Guardian of the Kingdom in her husband's absence in Germany, in Council, and orders for the despatch given.²⁰ On 6 October 1729, exactly two years to the day after Rollos received first preliminary instructions for their preparation, the necessary warrants for the despatch of these seals were signed,²¹ and in November, the Great Seal Deputed of George II for South Carolina was in transit to the colony.

From the proof impressions at the Royal Mint, both obverse and reverse of this seal are here illustrated as Plates 2 and 3, with clearer, crisper detail than has proved possible for George I's seal. The obverse of King and maiden is rendered much as before, the King somewhat stiffly upright and almost off balance. The colonial motto and identifying legend are easily legible, and the only notable change is the use of a bead-and-reel design for the outer rim of the border in place of the acanthus leaves of the previous reign. The general treatment of the reverse of

arms differs little from that of its predecessor, but the royal titles are differently rendered (the contracted version only being given this time): GEORGIUS • II • D • G • MAG • BRI • FR • ET • HI B • REX • F • D • BRUN • ET • LUN • DUX • S • R • I • AR • THES • ET • PR • EL, the most notable change being the insertion of PR[INCEPS] ("Prince") before "Elector."

This new seal of George II reached the colony early in the spring of 1730, and in accordance with the instructions earlier given him, the Governor returned the matrixes of George I's seal to the Committee for Trade and Plantations. On 20 July 1732 the Committee, having received all the George I seals except those for Jamaica and New Jersey, transmitted them to the Privy Council Office to be laid before the Queen, as Guardian of the Kingdom again in the King's absence, in Council.²² This was done on 10 August, when a formal Order in Council authorized defacement.²³ After this procedure, the defaced seals remained in the Privy Council Office for an undetermined and unspecified time before eventually being melted down and the silver re-used by the Royal Mint.

With the death of George II on 25 October 1760 the machinery for the issue of new seals of the new sovereign began its ponderous movement. On 31 October, less than a week after George III ascended the throne, a circular letter proclaiming the accession and again drawing attention to the provisions of section 9 of the statute 6 Anne c.7 (the Act of Succession, 1707) sanctioning the continuing use of the seals of the deceased sovereign until new seals should have been prepared, was despatched to colonial governors by the Board of Commissioners for Trade and Plantations.²⁴ On 2 December instructions were issued to Thomas Major, the seal engraver, to prepare the new seals for the North American and West Indian colonies.²⁵ Major was, however, removed from office early in 1761, and it was not until 13 January 1762 that his successor, Christopher Seaton, was given instructions in terms similar to those of 2 December 1760.²⁶ There the matter rested for more than six years, until 13 April 1767, when Seaton's new seals for the North American and West Indian colonies including South Carolina were formally approved by the Privy Council and ordered to be despatched.²⁷ The warrants for the use of the new seals were prepared shortly thereafter, and the seals sent by convenient sea passage to their destinations, which they reached by the summer of that year. The warrants also required, in accordance with practice, that the old seals should be returned to the Privy Council for formal defacement and melting down. The seal of George II for South Carolina, along with eight others, was laid before the King in Council on 20 April 1768, when formal order for their defacement was given.²⁸

Seaton's treatment of the scene on the obverse of George III's Great



PLATE 4 — Proof Impression — George III Seal Obverse



PLATE 5 — Proof Impression — George III Seal Reverse

Seal Deputed for South Carolina as illustrated in Plate 4 from the proof impression at the Royal Mint shows a lighter, more refreshing touch, with a younger sovereign, leaning more graciously towards his subject and no longer holding an orb in his left hand, and the maiden, arms held less imploringly and head more upright, before the King. This reflects Seaton's generally more relaxed, gracious, and humane treatment of all the devices on the colonial seals which he engraved, and it is, fancifully perhaps, a pity that the auguries of the seals were not matched by the reality of events. The only other change on the obverse is a return to the acanthus leaf outer border. The arms on the reverse again show slight differences in treatment, as Plate 5 from the Royal Mint proof impression shows; the Roman numeral is, naturally, changed from II to III in the royal title, and the PR[INCEPS] omitted. Again, an acanthus outer border replaces the previous reign's bead-and-reel.

Uniquely amongst the Great Seals Deputed of George III for the North American provinces, the South Carolina matrixes have survived to the present day and are in the collections of the Department of Mediaeval and Later Antiquities of the British Museum in London. How they got there is, however and unfortunately, not known.²⁹

It has been said that Lord William Campbell, the last royal Governor of the province, took the matrixes away with him when he left Charleston in the *Tamar* in September, 1775.³⁰ There must, however, be some doubt on this point since on 21 April 1782 William Bull, the Lieutenant-Governor during the British reoccupation of 1780-1782, wrote to Lord Germain, Secretary of State, that in accordance with royal instruction he had recently "caused Letters Patent to be issued under the Great Seal of his Majesty's Province of South Carolina constituting Robert Wells and William Charles Wells sole Vendue Master" for the province.³¹ It would be reasonable to assume that the matrixes from which the impression of the Great Seal attached to this document were made, were those of George III in use since 1767, but whether they were taken away by Campbell and brought back by Bull, or whether they remained in the colony between Campbell's departure and the restoration of royal government is unclear.

Upon his return to England, Bull wrote to Thomas Townshend, Secretary of State for the Home Department, on 19 January 1783 informing Townshend of his safe arrival at Brixham in the county of Devon, with his baggage and what he "could save from the Wreck of my Fortune." He does not, and one cannot perhaps be surprised at it, mention the seal matrixes. He may not himself have had them. He was accompanied by the other principal civil and legal offices of the province,

and it is probable that one of them, most likely the Secretary of the Province, would have charge of the matrixes, removed from the clutches of the new government and thus preventing illegal and unauthorized use.³² In at least two cases, the royal seals of the provinces of Virginia and New Hampshire are known to have passed into unauthorized hands and to have been in use as late as 1786.³³

The survival of the South Carolina matrixes for two centuries after they ceased to be used for the purposes for which they were created is a matter for celebration.

NOTES

1. The term "Great Seal Deputed" is used in English seal nomenclature to denote those seals which, over the course of centuries, have taken the place of the one Great Seal of the realm for the authentication of documents, which at one time would have been authenticated by the Great Seal itself. As government became more complex and its ramifications more widespread, the use of the one Great Seal became impossible, and so other seals fulfilled its tasks, some of them specifically being called Great Seals Deputed for particular business. Of this category of seal, those for use in the British colonies show the widest divergence from the traditional pattern of Great Seals and are probably the most interesting of them all.

2. Studies by the present writer of the Great Seals Deputed of Virginia have appeared in *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. LXVI (January, 1958), 1-21; of Maryland in the *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Vol. LIV, No. 2 (June, 1959), 30-37; of New Jersey in *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, Vol. LXXIX, No. 4 (October, 1961) 223-231; of Georgia in the *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. LXII, No. 4 (Winter, 1978), 281-287; of North Carolina in *Carolina Comments*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (March, 1980), 53-57; of Massachusetts Bay in *Proceedings of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, Vol. LIX (1982), 551-559; of East Florida in *Florida Historical Quarterly*, July, 1982, 49-53; and of New Hampshire scheduled for the fall issue, 1982, of *Historical New Hampshire*. A more general sketch of all the American colonial seals appears in *Antiques* for July, 1978.

3. *Acts of the Privy Council, Colonial Series*, Vol. II, 779-803; *Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies, 1720-21* (hereafter cited as CSP), 145.

4. Royal Mint Record Book, Vol. 7, p. 108 (now in the Public Record Office, Kew, ref: Mint 1/7).

5. These are reproduced in this booklet, from the writer's own photographs, with the permission of the Deputy Master of the Royal Mint.

6. Detached Seal XXXVI. 39. (In *Catalogue of Additions to Manuscripts in the British Museum, 1841-45* [1850], 142, this is erroneously described as the seal of Charles II for Barbados, and in W. de Gray Birch's *Catalogue of Seals in the British Museum*, Vol. III, 712, No. 14727 [1894], as being the seal of George II for South Carolina. There is no doubt that it is, however, George I's seal.) Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

7. Quarterly: 1, England impaling Scotland; 2, France Modern; 3, Ireland; 4, Tierced per pale and per chevron; (i) two leopards (for Brunswick); (ii) sown with hearts, a lion rampant (for Luneberg); (iii) a running horse (for Westphalia); on an escutcheon over all three the Crown of Charlemagne (for the Arch-Treasurer of the Holy Roman Empire), all being for Hanover.

8. Royal Mint Record Book, Vol 7, p. 108 (PRO ref: Mint 1/7) where Girard's own description of the royal titles differs minimally from those he actually engraved; he engraved EL[ECTOR] but says he engraved ELEC[TOR].

9. *CSP 1720-21*, 478.

10. See note 3 above.

11. *CSP 1722-23*, 126.

12. *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations* (hereafter cited as *JTP*), IV, 392.

13. *CSP 1726-27*, 309.

14. *Ibid.*, 339.

15. *Ibid.*, 352.

16. *JTP*, V, 358.

17. *Ibid.*, 359.

18. *Ibid.*, 366.

19. *Ibid.*, 421.

20. *CSP 1728-29*, 471.

21. *Ibid.*, 494.

22. *JTP*, VI, 306.

23. *CSP 1732*, 192.

24. *JTP*, XI, 131, 133, 134.

25. *Ibid.*, 142.

26. *Ibid.*, 301.

27. *Acts of the Privy Council of England, Colonial Series*, V, 86.

28. *Ibid.*

29. The matrixes are described in A.B. Tonnochy, *Catalogue of Seal Dies in the British Museum* (London, 1952), 52.

30. Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780* (New York, 1901), 68.

31. Public Record Office, CO5/176, 212-213.

32. *Ibid.*, 216-217.

33. The use of Great Seal Deputed of New Hampshire for George III has been discovered on a document dated 1786 (Public Record Office AO13/40). See *A Guide to Seals in the Public Record Office* (London, HMSO, 1954), 43, fn 3. The matrix of the seal for William and Mary for New Hampshire survives still in the possession of the New Hampshire Historical Society.

Peter Walne, County Archivist of Hertfordshire, England, since 1962, is an authority on the Great Seals Deputed of the former royal colonies in North America, as note 2 indicates. He served in the Royal Air Force during World War II. After the war he received bachelor's and master's degrees from Cambridge University and a graduate diploma in archives from the University of Liverpool. He served as Honorary Secretary of the Society of Archivists (Great Britain), 1952-1978, and is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, of the Royal Historical Society, and of the Society of American Archivists. He is an active member of the International Council on Archives and editor of *Guide to Manuscript Sources for the History of Latin America and the Caribbean in the British Isles* (Oxford University Press, 1972).

Mr. Walne's essay, *The Royal Great Seals Deputed of South Carolina*, was the inspiration for the exhibition, "Seals and Symbols of South Carolina Government," at the Columbia Museums of Art and Science — December 14, 1982 to January 23, 1983 — which brings to a close the State's commemoration of the Bicentennial of the American Revolution, 1776-1976. This booklet is designed as a complement to the exhibition and as a companion piece to the facsimile impressions of King George III's Great Seal Deputed of South Carolina, which are being made available in limited quantity for purchase by the public.

This booklet is set in a transitional type known as Baskerville. The text is printed on white wove offset; the cover is Carnival Antique. The design on the cover is a reproduction of the royal "achievement" (emblazoned coat of arms) of King George II as it appears on the cover of the Rice Act of 1730 — particularly important in bringing 18th-century prosperity to South Carolina. The Act itself, from the South Carolina Archives, like the silver matrixes of George III's Great Seal Deputed of South Carolina, is part of the "Seals and Symbols" exhibition.

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